

THE WEEK IN PHOTOS  
THE BACKPAGE, A10

# EAST OREGONIAN

APRIL 10-11, 2021

145th Year, No. 75

WINNER OF THE 2020 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD

\$1.50

## Search continues for missing Idaho woman

Deborah 'Deb' Hendrichs has been missing since Jan. 11

By DICK MASON  
La Grande Observer

MEACHAM — Cindy Taylor is not losing count of the days her sister has been missing. She also is not losing hope.

Taylor's sister, Deborah "Deb" Hendrichs, 56, of Star, Idaho, went

missing on Jan. 11 at about 5 p.m. just outside Meacham, where her car, a black Toyota RAV4, ran out of gas at a bridge entrance.

"This is day 87, I do not want this to become a cold case," she said.

Taylor has been working feverishly since Jan. 11 to find her sister. Taylor was in La Grande on Monday, April 5, and Tuesday, April 6, scouring the area in Meacham with her



Hendrichs

husband and two metal detector operators. The search, like others in the area, proved fruitless.

"We found nothing. We were hoping to find personal effects there," said Taylor, who lives in Merrill near Klamath Falls.

Oregon State Police Lt. Daniel Conner of Union County shares Taylor's frustration, explaining no new leads have surfaced.

"The case has gone absolutely dark," he said.

To get the investigation to move forward, OSP again is encourag-

ing people to come forward with any new information they have. State police is particularly eager to talk with anyone who may have seen suspicious activity late in the afternoon of Jan. 11 near where Hendrichs's compact SUV stalled, Conner said.

An Oregon Department of Transportation worker was the last person who reported seeing Hendrichs after her vehicle stalled. Conner said the ODOT employee asked Hendrichs if she needed help and she said her cellphone was not working in the

area but someone was coming to help. The ODOT employee then put out safety flares to protect Hendrichs and called OSP, which sent a trooper to assist.

The trooper arrived 20 minutes later. By then, Hendrichs's vehicle was empty. State police have not been able to confirm any reports of anyone seeing Hendrichs since that time.

Hendrichs is an employee of the Les Schwab Tire Center in

See Missing, Page A9

## Mr. Smith to return from D.C.

Gordon Smith heading back to Pendleton after retirement

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Gordon Smith is returning home.

Following 24 years in Washington, D.C., first as a U.S. senator then as the chief executive officer of the National Association of Broadcasters, Smith is stepping down to an advisory role with the lobbying group and returning to his birthplace: Pendleton.

In a video message announcing his retirement, Smith said he would step down at the end of 2021 to spend more time on his family business, his church and his family.

"Many of these things I have put on hold this past quarter century to give public service and to be among broadcasters," he said. "I look forward to time with them, doing things that grandfathers ought to do: attending baseball games, recitals and more."

As a lobbyist, Smith represented some of the largest radio and television broadcasting companies in the country, including iHeartMedia, Cumulus Media and the Sinclair Broadcast Group. And although providing news is only one part of what these broadcasters do, it's one

See Mr. Smith, Page A9



Smith



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

At midnight on Thursday, April 8, 2021, Lifeways closed its Aspen Springs Psychiatric Hospital in Hermiston after just over six months in operation.

# A BIG LOSS

## Lifeways closes Aspen Springs as psychiatric hospital

By JADE MCDOWELL  
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — When Aspen Springs Psychiatric Hospital opened in Hermiston, it was hailed as a sorely-needed addition to the state's meager supply of mental health treatment beds. But the facility closed at midnight on Thursday, April 8, after just over six months in operation, citing "unsustainable" difficulties staffing it.

Umatilla County Commissioner John Shafer said Aspen Springs had been a "wonderful" addition to the county's efforts to improve access to mental health services, and he was disappointed it would not continue.

"It kind of took the wind out of our sails, to be honest," he said. "It was a huge blow."

Lifeways, a community mental health provider covering parts of Eastern Oregon and Idaho, opened the 16-bed inpatient hospital for acute psychiatric care officially in September 2020, four years after it first

broke ground on the project. According to a news release, it served a total of 75 patients between then and its closure on April 8. The facility was at the highest level of psychiatric care offered in Oregon, for individuals experiencing a severe mental health crisis.

The news release stated Lifeways will work with Oregon Health Authority to find "an alternative level of care for Aspen Springs that is more aligned with health care worker availability." Liz Johnsen, chief

See Loss, Page A9

## Evolving tech changes work at electric cooperatives

Umatilla Electric Cooperative linemen use GIS in the field

By JADE MCDOWELL  
East Oregonian

HERMISTON — When Mitch Colvin started working as a lineman for Umatilla Electric Cooperative six years ago, he spent a lot of time

looking at maps.

The maps, which crews hauled around in their pickup trucks, spanned two black binders, each several inches thick and much wider than a standard binder. When linemen needed to locate a specific utility pole or other infrastructure, they had to look up the right paper map out of thousands, then search the tiny numbers on the page, looking for the right one.

Now, everything is digitized and everyone has their own iPad.

"It speeds up the process a ton," Colvin said. "You just type it in and it pulls it right up."

The iPad not only pulls up the information that was previously contained in the maps, but also a treasure trove of other details, from the size of a transformer to the name and phone number of a customer associated with a meter. Linemen can also

add information, such as photos, from on-site.

The Geographic Information System used to help crews pinpoint infrastructure in the field is overseen by Adelaide Zumwalt, GIS administrator for UEC.

At the cooperative's Hermiston office, she toggled through different maps, showing an interconnected

See Electric, Page A9

## COVID-19 NUMBERS IN UMATILLA COUNTY

TOTALS FOR WEEK ENDING 4/8/2021



7 294671 10002 2